

## Nebraska Broadband Planning Quarterly Report – January-March 2010

1. **If the project received funding for broadband planning, please describe progress made against all goals, objectives, and milestones detailed in the approved project plan. Be sure to include a description of each major activity/milestone that you plan to complete and your current status. (Answer below.)**

This is the first Nebraska Broadband planning quarterly report. The Nebraska Public Service Commission was notified by NTIA in January that their mapping and planning grant was approved effective January 1. The Nebraska Information Technology Commission Community Council (NITC), University of Nebraska - Lincoln (UNL), and Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED) are cooperatively leading the effort to address the broadband planning needs of Nebraska's communities. UNL is the fiscal agent for the planning part of the grant.

A number of activities were identified in the planning grant to identify barriers to the adoption of broadband and IT services, creating and facilitating local technology planning teams, and collaborating with broadband service providers to encourage broadband deployment and use. These activities will be used in this report to update the broadband grant status.

### **Administrative**

The broadband planning team started meeting on a regular basis beginning in October 2009. The initial meetings focused on the development of the household survey questions. Members of the planning team have participated in the NTIA informational webinars, presented at meetings regarding the planning process and communicate regularly with the Public Service Commission (PSC) on the project. All team members participated in a Public Service Commission meeting in February with the providers and members of the Apex group.

*Status:* The planning grant is on schedule and the proposed budget and activities are being followed. There are funds in the grant to hire a project manager to assist the team in creating a statewide plan. *Efforts to hire an individual are on hold at this time as we await official notification from the NTIA regarding funding.*

### **Internet Connectivity and Use in Nebraska: A Household Survey**

Nebraskans were surveyed about their computer and Internet usage, challenges and desires for the future through a mail survey conducted in February and March 2010 by UNL. The survey mailed to 6,600 Nebraskans in February 2010 utilized the Dillman Total Design Method to achieve a high response rate. The household names were obtained from a marketing firm. The survey included four separate mailings to the households using the State of Nebraska Public Service Commission letterhead.

As of March 31, the survey has a 47% response rate. The high response rate and large sample will enable generalization to regions as well as metropolitan areas. In addition to the regional comparisons, data will be generalized by location of residence (outside city limits compared to those living in communities), education level, income level, age, gender, presence of children in the household, racial and ethnic group, employment status and occupation.

The development of the questionnaire began in October 2009 and was finalized shortly after the broadband grant was awarded in January. Questions from the Pew Foundation and other national telecommunication surveys were used in order to compare results. A copy of the survey is attached.

*Status:* The household survey component is on schedule and the analysis of the data will begin in the next quarter (April – June). The survey results will be shared with Apex CoVantage, the vendor conducting the mapping component of the grant.

### **Business Survey**

Businesses will be surveyed through DED's Business Retention and Expansion program to identify the strengths and challenges they face in utilizing technology. Currently over 400 key businesses are surveyed annually by the Department of Economic Development Statewide. To develop the statewide plan, over 1000 businesses will be surveyed as communities and regions have the capability to gather information from all types of businesses including retail, health care and services. The BR&E survey asks over 10 specific questions related to technology and broadband utilization. Additional questions will be developed that relate specifically to future opportunities. The data will be pulled together and themes will be developed.

*Status:* DED has conducted an informational webinar for communities to build awareness. Through the first quarter, 16 communities agreed to participate in the process. During the next quarter, DED will continue to identify up to 27 communities to participate in the survey process. The additional questions will also be finalized. The business survey component is on schedule.

### **Focus Groups**

Seven to 10 focus groups will be held with anchor institutions and utility providers as well as populations with low usage rates to gain understanding into the barriers from their perspective. Focus groups will also be held with businesses including farmers and ranchers.

*Status:* The focus groups will be conducted by UNL after the analysis of the technology survey and initial results of business survey.

### **Regional Planning Teams**

Regional planning teams will be formed to conduct regional assessments, prioritize opportunities, and develop strategies. Regional coaches will assist planning teams in conducting the development of plans.

*Status:* Planning team members have shared initial information with some existing regional groups. Regional coaches have not been identified. During the next quarter, all regional groups will be identified and we will begin to identify regional coaches.

### **Regional Forums**

Regional forums will be conducted to present broadband mapping and mail survey results, to solicit feedback, and to kick off regional planning efforts. Project partners will work with regional planning teams to host forums to present broadband mapping data and mail survey results, to solicit feedback, and to kick off regional planning efforts.

*Status:* The regional forum component is on schedule. Forums will not be held until after the mapping data and mail survey results are complete and analyzed.

### **Building a Plan to Encourage Broadband Use in Communities and Regions**

The original grant submission identified demonstration workshops and training sessions to increase technology usage. The beginning of April 2010, NTIA requested an adjustment to the grant. This portion of the grant is being revised.

*Status: This section has been removed.*

**2. Please describe any challenge or obstacle that you have encountered and detail the mitigation strategies the project team is employing. (Answer below.)**

There have not been any particular challenges or obstacles to the grant efforts itself. We have a good working relationship with the Public Service Commission. The one challenge or obstacle has been waiting for the official award from NTIA. Due to this, all planning activities have moved forward cautiously with exception of the mail survey.

**3. Does the project team anticipate any changes to the current project plan for broadband planning? If so, please describe these anticipated changes. Please note that NTIA will need to approve changes to the project plan before they can be implemented. (Answer below.)**

At this stage there are not any anticipated changes to the current project plan other than those requested by NTIA. The beginning of April we received a request to modify one section of the planning grant.

**4. Funding:**

- a. How much grant funding has been expended as of the end of the last quarter, and how much funding remains? (Use attached spreadsheet.)
- b. How much of the matching funds have been expended as of the end of the last quarter, and how much funding remains? (Use attached spreadsheet.)
- c. For any funds expended for a subcontract, please identify the name of the subcontractor and the amount. An example is provided in the template. (Use attached spreadsheet.)

**5. Please provide any other information that you think would be useful to NTIA as it assesses your broadband planning project. (Answer below.)**

The plan identified in the grant application is being followed at this time with exception of the requested revision from NTIA. We are still in the initial stages of the grant. The household survey has moved forward and the data collection is complete.

**Project Partner Team Members:** Anne Byers, Nebraska Information Technology Commission; Connie Hancock, UNL Extension – Cheyenne County; Tim O’Brien, Nebraska Department of Economic Development; Charlotte Narjes and Becky Vogt, UNL Center for Applied Rural Innovation.

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